

General Essay Types for Graduate School Applications

An integral part of graduate school applications is the written statement/essay.

Written statements/essays offer:

- review committees more insight into who you are
- your one chance to “talk” about yourself if there are no interviews in the process

General Types of Application Statements

Statement of Purpose

A statement of purpose (SOP) expresses your main reasons for applying to a program.

SOPs are not creative essays like you might have written for college admissions. They are focused on your field of interest and highlight your technical skills and qualifications more than anything else.

The overarching elements of the SOP are:

1. your career goals
2. your background and qualifications for grad school that show how your goal has developed over time
3. how a program will help you reach your goals

If applying for a research/thesis-based master's or a doctorate, you also include 2-3 researchers you want to work with and why. The researchers are the top reasons why you are applying to a research program.

Though not the norm, some programs have rotations in the first year before students and professors decide to work together and have applicants rank professors or not list any at all as part of SOP. Be sure to read the guidelines for your application

Personal Statement/Personal History

A personal statement (PS), sometimes called a personal history, is above all personal. Depending on the actual question, a PS gives you the chance to tell readers about:

- your motivations for applying beyond your career goals
- the story behind your resume/CV and beyond your professional goals
- Why you are applying beyond your academic and professional qualifications
- How your life experiences beyond professional ones have shaped your decision to apply for a program and/or will shape your experience and relationships with others in graduate school

Medical or law school personal statements are not the same as graduate school ones.

Research Statement

A research statement is your chance to be highly technical and offer full details about the research you have done and want to do. They read like research proposals. Faculty in your field are the best resources for helping you write research statements. Not all schools require a research statement.